

WMC Retrospective Research Findings and Early Insights

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As part of a retrospective study, a series of nine focus groups involving 68 participants were conducted to better understand employee health concerns, including substance abuse, and to assess employee knowledge and attitudes about LHS programs to address substance abuse and other health issues. Participants were recruited primarily through announcements in the weekly employee newsletter and strategically placed flyers. Participants resembled the LHS employee population in terms of gender and ethnicity. Focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes and were conducted on-site at LHS. All participants were asked the same kind of questions, meetings were transcribed by a court reporter, and an analysis was performed using ethnography.

Question Number 1: “What are the main health concerns of you and your fellow employees?” This question was intended to see if anyone would mention substance abuse. The participants’ primary concern was health care; stress was second; and workload or caring for more people with less time was third. Disease, primarily cancer, and exposure to disease at the work site, particularly HIV and hepatitis, were ranked fourth and fifth as concerns. Focus group members also mentioned insurance coverage, reduced benefits, and increased costs of the premiums. Of the 346 responses, only three mentioned alcohol, and these comments were generic.

Question Number 2: “To what extent is alcohol or drugs a problem among your fellow employees or their families?” Substance abuse was not viewed overall as a great problem.

Question Number 3: “What programs does LHS offer to promote employee health or to address employee health problems such as substance abuse?” Programs identified most often were LEAPs, the employee wellness program, and the EAP program. Participants seemed much more familiar with LEAPS than EAP and were generally very enthusiastic

about LEAPS. People who were familiar with it liked the EAP, while those who were less knowledgeable about it were suspicious of it. Participants when asked what could be done to improve the programs or to add to them responded that enough programs were available, but that some programs had problems: access at a convenient time, confidentiality, counseling, and disseminating more information.

Question Number 4: “If you or your family member had an alcohol or drug problem, where would you go for help?” Slightly less than half of the participants said that they would use an in-house program, at least initially. The rest said they would not for reasons of privacy and confidentiality.

Question Number 5: “What do you think about random drug testing as a way of dealing with substance abuse at the work site?” Almost half of the respondents were against it, especially males; the rest were for it, mostly females.

In summary, substance abuse is not considered a very serious problem at LHS, but stress is a large problem. It was recommended that substance abuse be best approached through stress management.